Overview of the Video

The video, "Why John Called Jesus 'The Word': The Hidden Meaning Behind John 1:1" (Deep Made Simple, published July 27, 2026), argues that John's choice of *logos* as a title for Jesus deliberately layers three linguistic traditions: the Hebrew *dabar* (davar), the Aramaic Targumic *memra*, and the Greek *logos* of the philosophers. Its thesis is that John "settles" a centuries-long ambiguity in Jewish tradition about "the word of the Lord" by declaring that this word is not a principle or a force but a person — Jesus. The video moves through Genesis creation, the Hebrew Prophets, Aramaic synagogue Targum readings, and Greek philosophical schools (Heraclitus, Stoics) before landing on John 1:14's "tabernacled among us".[^1]

The overall theological conclusion — that Jesus as *Logos* is a divine person rather than an abstract force, echoing Genesis's creative word and fulfilling long-standing Jewish and Greek anticipation — is a mainstream, defensible Christian reading shared by many popular-level teachers. However, several historical, linguistic, and epistemological claims in the video are oversimplified, anachronistic, or state as settled fact what scholarship treats as contested. Below is a section-by-section evaluation, followed by an assessment of whether these weaker claims are at least plausible.[2][3][^4]

Hebrew Dabar: Broadly Accurate, but Overstated Etymology

The video's treatment of Hebrew *dabar* (דָּבָר) as denoting not merely speech but "matter," "event," and "active force" is well supported. Strong's lexicon and Hebrew Bible usage confirm *dabar* covers speech, thing, matter, event, command, and promise, occurring roughly 1,441 times with a "quasi-substantial" range of meaning tied to divine action and creation. The claim that "the word of the Lord" functions dynamically — accomplishing what it declares (e.g., Isaiah 55, Psalm 33:9) — matches standard Old Testament theology. This part of the video is linguistically sound, though it compresses a technical semantic-range discussion into a simplified narrative device ("word as event/arrow") that a specialist would want qualified — *dabar*'s "active force" sense is a feature of Hebrew's verbal noun structure and idiom, not evidence of a distinct proto-theological doctrine of a personal, effective Word separate from God's speech-act generally.[5][6]

Aramaic Memra: The Video's Weakest and Most Contested Claim

This is where the video's argument runs into serious difficulty. The video claims that in the "Aramaic Targums," *memra* ("word of the Lord") was used across "every synagogue" for "generation after generation" as a quasi-independent entity whose identity was left an open question — implying John resolved a live theological puzzle by identifying this *memra* with a person.[^1]

This framing significantly overstates and distorts a genuinely disputed area of scholarship:

- **Dating problem:** The video implies first-century synagogue audiences were hearing memra-laden Targums "every Sabbath" contemporaneous with Jesus and John. In reality,

the dating of the Palestinian Targums (Neofiti, Pseudo-Jonathan) most relevant to the Memra concept is heavily disputed — estimates range from the 1st to as late as the 4th–5th centuries CE, and Targum Onkelos itself is usually dated no earlier than the late 1st–2nd century, with final redaction in Babylonia centuries later. Using these documents to reconstruct exactly what a boy would have heard "every Sabbath" in a synagogue in Jesus's lifetime, as the video's narrative vignette does, presses fragile and contested dating evidence into a vivid but historically unsupported scene.[7][8][9][10]

- **Nature of the Memra**: Mainstream Targum scholarship (Wolfson, McNamara, C.K. Barrett, and more recent treatments) holds that *memra* is not a hypostasis or quasi-independent being awaiting identification — it is a reverential circumlocution, a way of referring to God's own action without invoking his name directly, similar to *Shekinah*. Barrett explicitly called Memra "a blind alley in the study of the biblical background of John's Logos doctrine". The video's claim that "the synagogue had never quite decided what the memra was" therefore misrepresents a scholarly consensus that the Memra was *not* an unresolved ontological question in Judaism at all — it was a well-understood linguistic device, not a mystery John "solved."[11][12][^13]

Greek Logos: Reasonably Accurate but Compressed

The video's summary of Greek *logos* — a "cosmic, impersonal" ordering principle in Heraclitus and the Stoics, contrasted with John's personal Logos — reflects a standard and defensible reading of Greek philosophy. Heraclitus used *logos* to describe a common, rational structure underlying the cosmos and human perception of it, though scholars debate whether he meant a metaphysical principle or something closer to an account/description of the world's self-revelation. The Stoics developed *logos* further into a materialist, rational governing principle of the universe (*logos spermatikos*), and popular apologetics videos correctly note this contrast with John's personalized, incarnate Logos. What the video omits — a significant gap for a "first-century" claim — is Philo of Alexandria, a Hellenistic Jewish contemporary of Jesus who had already partially personified the Logos as a mediating figure between the transcendent God and the world. Many scholars regard Philo, not Heraclitus or the Stoics directly, as the closest documented contemporary parallel to John's usage, and omitting him is a notable historical gap.[14][3][15][16][^17]

Historical and Epistemological Issues

The video's central historical mechanism — a Jewish boy hearing Hebrew Torah read aloud "at the front" then immediately translated into Aramaic Targum "the way he has heard it every Sabbath he can remember" — dramatizes a synagogue practice (public oral Targum recitation) that is attested in later rabbinic sources but whose precise first-century form, wording, and universality remain uncertain and reconstructed largely from post-70 CE and later rabbinic materials. Presenting this reconstruction as straightforward historical fact, rather than a plausible but evidentially thin scholarly inference, overstates certainty. Epistemologically, the video adopts a "harmonization" method common to popular biblical teaching: it treats three distinct and asynchronous bodies of evidence (biblical Hebrew usage, later Targumic Aramaic, and Greek philosophical texts spanning centuries) as a single converging first-century "text behind the text" that John consciously synthesized. While John's prologue plausibly does draw on Jewish wisdom/word traditions and does resonate with Hellenistic vocabulary, the specific

triangulated synthesis the video presents (davar → memra → logos as three sequential "layers" John deliberately answers) is a rhetorically effective teaching device rather than an academically established compositional theory; NT scholars remain divided on whether John's primary background is Genesis/Wisdom literature, Philonic Logos speculation, or a broader Hellenistic-Jewish milieu, and several caution against overreliance on the Memra specifically.[18][13][8][14][^1]

Theological and Philosophical Assessment

Theologically, the video's core claim — that John personalizes what Greek philosophy and Jewish circumlocution left impersonal, presenting the Word as "with God" and "God" (John 1:1) and later incarnate (John 1:14) — sits within mainstream orthodox Christology and is consistent with how other serious popular-level teachers frame the passage, including its bookend structure with John 1:18 and the "tabernacling" imagery tied to the wilderness tabernacle. Philosophically, the video's contrast between an "impersonal, cold" Greek Logos and a "loving" personal Logos is a fair characterization of Stoic materialism versus Johannine personalism, though it simplifies a genuinely rich and varied philosophical tradition into a rhetorical foil.[19][2]

Are the Weaker Claims at Least Plausible?

Even at its weakest points, the video's assertions are plausible rather than false. They are best characterized as overconfident simplifications of genuinely debated material, not fabrications.

- **Memra as an "unresolved mystery"**: This is the shakiest claim, but it is not groundless. While the dominant view treats memra as a reverential circumlocution, a respected minority strand of scholarship — Daniel Boyarin's "Jewish binitarianism" argument, and older work by scholars such as Alfred Edersheim — does argue that memra reflects a real strand of Second Temple Jewish thought in which "the word of God" carried semi-independent, quasi-personal overtones that Logos theology later drew on. The video picked the more provocative side of a live scholarly debate rather than inventing a position from nothing. It is plausible, but presented with far more certainty than the evidence warrants.[13][11][^18]
- **Targum dating and the "synagogue every Sabbath" scene**: This is plausible as a general practice. Oral Aramaic paraphrasing (targum) of Torah readings is well-attested as a first-century synagogue custom, even though the specific written Targums available today (Neofiti, Onkelos) are later and cannot be used as verbatim transcripts of what was actually said in Jesus's day. The practice itself is real; the specific wording attributed to it is the anachronistic part.[9][7]
- **Greek logos omitting Philo**: This gap is incomplete rather than implausible. Nothing the video says about Heraclitus or the Stoics is inaccurate; it simply skips the strongest first-century parallel, Philo of Alexandria, which would have strengthened its case for Greek "background" rather than weakened it.[16][17][^14]

Taken together, the video reflects real, defensible minority or popular positions pushed to a higher level of certainty than mainstream scholarship supports. It is not making claims contradicted by the evidence; it is under-qualifying claims that remain contested.

Summary Table

Dimension	Video's Claim	Scholarly Assessment	Plausible at Worst?
Hebrew *dabar*	Word = active, creative force/event	Well-supported by lexical and OT theological data [6][5]	Yes — mainstream accurate
Aramaic *memra*	Unresolved theological question in every synagogue, later "settled" by John	Overstated; mainstream view treats Memra as reverential circumlocution, not an open ontological puzzle [11][13]	Plausible — reflects a real minority scholarly view (Boyarin, Edersheim), overstated in certainty [^18]
Targum dating	Implies live first-century synagogue practice matching later Targum texts	Dating of Neofiti/Pseudo-Jonathan is disputed (1st–5th century); risky to use as direct evidence for Jesus-era practice [7][9] [^10]	Plausible — the general practice is real; specific wording is anachronistic
Greek *logos*	Impersonal cosmic principle in Heraclitus/Stoics	Accurate in broad strokes; omits Philo of Alexandria, the closest 1st-century Jewish-Hellenistic parallel [17][14]	Yes — accurate but incomplete, not implausible
Overall synthesis	Three-language "layers" deliberately and sequentially resolved by John	Plausible homiletical framework, not an established critical-scholarly consensus; several scholars caution against overreading Memra parallels [13][18]	Plausible as rhetorical framing, not as settled scholarship

Bottom Line

The video is theologically orthodox and linguistically informative at a popular level, particularly its treatment of Hebrew *dabar* and the basic Greek philosophical background. Its weakest point is the treatment of the Aramaic *memra*, which it presents as an unresolved first-century mystery that John personally "settles" — a dramatic narrative move that runs against the substantial scholarly consensus that Memra was a well-understood grammatical circumlocution for God rather than a live theological question awaiting resolution. Even so, this claim draws on a genuine, if minority, scholarly position rather than fabricated material. The video also elides genuine uncertainty about Targum dating and omits Philo of Alexandria, whose writings offer the most historically proximate parallel to Johannine Logos language. Viewers seeking rigorous historical-linguistic grounding should treat the video as an evocative and largely plausible teaching tool rather than a scholarly-grade account of first-century Jewish and Greek word-theology.[3][12][6][14][11][18][13][7]

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